DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 216 423 EA 014 591

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TITLE Accountability and the Politics of Education.
PUB DATE 5 Mar 82
NOTE 9p.; Presented at the Meeting of the Kansas Association of Teachers of English (Topeka, KS, March 5, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; Board of Education Role; Communication (Thought Transfer); *Educational Legislation; Elementary Secondary Education; Language Teachers; Legislators; *Lobbying; *Political Power; State Legislation; Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS Coalitions; Kansas; *Politics of Education

ABSTRACT

Political effectiveness is important for English and language arts teachers. A videotape presentation stressing educational accountability (not included in this document) and a list of the educational issues affected by pending bills in the Kansas state legislature both point to the necessity of political involvement. There are three lessons to learn to be effective in legislative politics. The first is to recognize political seniority and power and their importance relative to the ideas behind legislation. Several quotes from prayers by the Kansas legislative chaplain help illustrate this point. The second lesson is that one should form coalitions among common interests, such as teachers, school boards, and school administrators. The fate of two Kansas school finance bills--an unsuccessful one pushed by teachers and a reformulated bill that has won broad legislative backing--emphasizes this point. The third lesson stresses that one must communicate effectively with legislators and that personal communication is the most effective method. Related to this lesson is the fact that literacy and communication are economically important, which suggests that English and language arts teachers are helping make the national economy more literate and hence more productive. (RW)

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KANSAS ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
Topeka, Kansas
March 5, 1982

ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION

Dr. A. W. Dirks, Division Director
Research, Planning, and Development Services

Recognition of Chairperson, Senator Nancy Parrish, and President, Dr. Ray Crisp, and members of the Kansas Association of Teachers of English.

I have often fantasized about having an affair with a refined, petite, intelligent teacher of English who would be the ultimate in communications. It has been my good fortune to have had that fantasy come true, since my wife has been an English teacher at Southeast High School for the past twenty years. One thing she refuses to do is grade my papers or help me with my speeches; therefore, all the errors of diction, verbs, and other miscues are my own.

My presentation this morning will be in two parts. The first part will be a video cassette tape on Program Accountability and the second part will be a discussion on the politics of education.

The program accountability video cassette tape compresses into fifteen minutes, fifteen months of work studying the topics of language arts - composition, language arts - reading, mathematics, and social studies. The purpose of the tape was to highlight our school district's concern with accountability and with raising achievement standards, and was presented to the Chamber of Commerce and to the business leaders of Wichita in December, 1981. Dr. Ray Crisp, your KATE President, played a major role as chairperson of the subcommittee for language arts - composition.

-- PESENTATION OF VIDEOTAPE --

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Since Dr. Bechtold is not here, obviously, he cannot personally present the Wichita Model for Accountability. However, there may be some of you who would like to study the final product, entitled "A Model for Accountability." If so, you may pick up a printed copy at the close of the meeting. The late 60's and 70's were known as the Age of Aquarius, with an undue emphasis on the individual. Whether you agree or not, the 80's are times of ACCOUNTABILITY for teachers and students. This new era demands accountability in terms of finances, time, and, certainly, higher standards of achievement.

The second part of this presentation leads logically, from the emphasis on ACCOUNTABILITY, to the POLITICS OF EDUCATION. The state mandated competency based tests for students is one evidence of the relationship of the topics presented this morning. The several bills in the Kansas Legislature for teacher testing, compulsory attendance, compulsory entrance age, competency based tests, school audits, and school finance are further evidence of the importance of this particular topic. There have been over 100 bills introduced that would have an impact on education, if enacted. Candidly, I would note that only a few will survive, and that is certainly to the benefit of education in Kansas.

Perhaps Chaplain Fred S. Hollomon has captured the legislative scene in words as well as anyone. His prose and poetry may differ from your English Literature and American Literature - but he has a message, and a book of his Senate Prayers has been published. The legislators, even though they are a public and governmental body with pupils in the gallery, every day take time to start each session with prayer. It seems somewhat ironic that while the captive audience of the State is allowed to pray, such practice is NOT ALLOWED in our public schools. I would like to share with you the text of two of these recent opening prayers:

SENATE CHAMBER, THE ELEVENTH DAY, JANUARY 26, 1982:

Today, I would like to pray especially on behalf of the

sixteen democrats.

They experience frustration since often they do not have the votes to accomplish what they would like. Once in a while they can celebrate when five republicans see it their way.

They keep hearing that there are some advantages in being the minority, but they find such advantages hard to identify.

Lord, encourage them by reminding them that the minority plays a vital role in the workings of democracy.

Oh yes, Lord, in case the republicans are listening, please assure them they will get equal time. . . .Amen.

SENATE CHAMBER, THE TWELFTH DAY, JANUARY 27, 1982:

Today, Oh Lord, I come to you especially on behalf of the twenty-four republicans.

One of the penalties of being in the majority is the likelihood of being blamed for everything that goes wrong,
While this is not altogether fair, may they be keenly cognizant of the responsibility they bear in conceiving and giving birth to legislation.

Help the leadership deal astutely with the tension between deadlines and debate. Keep them receptive to input from both sides of the aisle.

And may they shoulder their responsibilities with such alacrity and concern as to command the respect of their colleagues on the south side as well as the citizens whom they serve. . . . . Amen.

Chaplain Hollomon commands such respect that he can cause all forty senators to stand for him and remain silent when he intones,

"Shall we pray." These bipartisan prayers go beyond words, to show the politics of education -- that is, the majority rules -- and while ideas hopefully will prevail they are subject to SENIORITY, POWER, and POLITICS, which is ONE OF THE FIRST LESSONS IN THE POLITICAL WORLD.

Last year -- after the main session had closed, the vacation had ended, and the legislators had returned for the veto session for the purpose of enacting a school bill -- these comments were noted and tell you better than I could about the prevailing emotions:

> "Out West where the wind blows, and the dust blows, and the aroma is called Essence De Bovine and you have to watch where you walk when the 'chips' are down - so it is with this School Bill."
>
> One senator, during the late conference hearings on education remarked, "We ought to sell tickets to this show and place the money in the school fund."
>
> During the three day wrap up another was heard to quip, "I only brought one shirt and I don't intend to wash it."

Last year, the legislators stated their priorities were "schools" and "highways." However, schools were left with inadequate budgets and the roads with chuck holes. Essentially, these priorities did not receive the attention they deserved.

Perhaps I should raise the rhetorical question, "HOW CAN IT BE POLITICALLY ASUTE AND EFFECTIVE?" I am not an expert! In fact, my job description has only a small addition, consisting of one sentence, on "Legislative Liaison Responsibilities." My responsibilities are to communicate from the Board to the legislators and from the legislators to the Board. I have learned a few things - like, "Don't panic, tomorrow will be different and maybe even worse." The long road, from the introduction of a bill to the Governor's signature, is

truly a journey of checks and balances. It is best to voice your opinion as early as possible in opposition to a bad bill or in support of a good one. Lobbyists are very candid among themselves and are sometimes referred to as "THE THIRD HOUSE." Should there be unanimity of opinion among many lobbyists of different groups, this would influence legislators. Consider, if the teachers support the Governor, the Boardssupport the Senate, and the administrators support the House, who could possibly win under those circumstances. Obviously, the SECOND LESSON IS TO FORM COALITIONS AMONG COMMON INTERESTS.

The teachers are a more effective lobby than the administrators, and the Kansas Association of School Boards is an effective lobby. Last year was not a good year, when the teacher lobby at the outset backed one idea and staked its all on the Governor. The School Bill was vetoed and that was the end of the School Finance Law. This past summer a bipartisan Committee from both Houses and a representative from the Governor's office forged a new bill that was very forward looking in concept. This interim committee, after six months of study, supported the proposed bill which is now known as House Bill 2632. -- (EXPAND ON THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE INTERIM COMMITTEE.) -- Interim bills have about a two-thirds possibility of being approved and those supported by wide margins have even a better chance. The bill passed the House Education Committee with only two dissenting votes and passed the House by 92 to 32 votes. In Sedgwick County, 16 out of 18 representatives supported the bill. The Bill was heard in the Senate Education Committee this week. Before one becomes too euphoric, there are other factors to consider, -- (ELABORATE ON THE PROGRESS OF THE BILL,) -- It is not a good idea to raise property or other taxes in an election year. Methods of funding, such as five different severance tax bills were introduced in the House Committee. Several other tax raising measures were also introduced, and all of these have supporters and detractors which may

eventually cause the demise of the School Bill. For instance, the leadership of both Houses, Senator Doyen and Speaker Lady, may be potential guvernatorial candidates as well as Governor Carlin himself, and each has a difference finance plan.

The THIRD LESSON IS TO PERSONALLY CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES, SENATORS, AND THE GOVERNOR when a bill is pending. Telephone calls, personal notes, and letters are very effective but personal contact is the most effective. Form letters and cards are only a little better than a polling technique. Legislative members who receive 25 to 50 communications over a period of time have been known to exclaim, "They're really on my back on this one! I've really got to move." In exploring further the personal contact method you must be forewarned. Lobbyists' stories abound and some of them, unfortunately, are very true. I have watched some of the more successful lobbyists and have tried to learn from them. People like Bill Mitchell, Pete McGill, and Reverend Richard Taylor are models of persistence, patience, and power. Now, there was a lobbyist in Washington who was married to a Kansan, she was Paula Parkinson; you may have read in the media about her exploits, escapades, and generous favors while she sought votes last year. She was supporting a single bill, which eventually was defeated. I concluded then that it pays to keep a low profile. "Victory has a thousand fathers, defeat is an orphan."

I would like to call attention to an article in Today's Education, the February-March, 1982, issue. The article, "Our Investment in Public Education" by Mr. Johnson, a former English teacher and a free lance writer, combines the elements of accountability and the importance of communication and economics. He concludes that literacy, or reading and writing, accounts for 23.5 percent of our gross national produce and, roughtly, 29 percent of our national income. Employees of all types devote almost one-third of their working day to tasks

that require reading and writing. While literacy definitely carries with it a a cost of approximately $285 per person for instruction and materials to make a person literate, yet the yields cited previously were $5.8 for every dollar invested. The lesson is simply this: Our entire economic enterprise depends on you language arts instructors to help make our nation more literate and more productive.

Even more significant is the fact, previously mentioned, that one-third of every day, regardless of the type of work, is devoted to reading and writing, and this percentage will increase with word processors, microcomputers, and robots. We have gone through the era of the importance of vocational education and later, in the late 50's, the sciences, and in the 60's and 70's the social sciences. Now we are in an era centered on the importance of communications and literacy, for self-development and the art of communications and for economic survival. The third lesson of effective communications in the economic world has equal impact in the world of POLITICS.

It is a high privilege to have had the opportunity to speak to a group of such importance. May I share another prayer that illustrates the importance of communications--this too from the pen of Senate Chaplain Fred S. Hollomon:

SENATE CHAMBER, THE TWENTIETH DAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1982:

> . . . We seem to agree we are all against big government, big business, big labor, big deficits, and bureaucrats.
>
> On the other hand, we are all for small business, the little people, the poor, and the consumer.
>
> Yet when each issue is raised, we start disagreeing. Is it because we use the same terms to mean something different.
>
> Oh Lord, so people will know where we stand, help us at least to agree on what we are going to disagree.
>
> . . . Amen.

There are many ways to be effective in politics and I have tried to expound on three lessons: (1) Recognize SENIORITY and POWER, (2) form coalitions, and lastly (3), be EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATORS.

Representative Mike Hayden, the powerful Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, recently described the School Bill situation thusly: "That's kind of the way we've look at school finance, like an ostrich with one end in the sand and the other in the air."

I know I'm biased, but English teachers and Language Arts teachers are so very important; whether it is in the area of ACCOUNTABILITY or in any area of communications, you will be among the leaders in the 80's.

Thank you!